

Delaware Colleges Say Smarter Balanced Assessments Are Good Measure Of College Readiness

Governor's remarks from the event

Students who do well will not have to pass placement tests and can take credit-bearing courses

Dover, DE – Four institutions of higher education in Delaware—the University of Delaware, Delaware Technical Community College, Delaware State University and Wilmington University—all have said students' scores on the state's new 11th grade Smarter Assessments are a good measure of college readiness and will be accepted in lieu of a separate placement test, Gov. Jack Markell announced today.



High school juniors started taking the Smarter English language arts (ELA) and Smarter Mathematics assessments Monday and all students will complete them before June 4. The colleges' decisions mean that students who score 3 or better on the tests' 4-point scale now will be able to enroll in credit-bearing English and mathematics classes, as long as they meet certain other conditions, and can avoid taking costly remedial classes that not count toward graduations. They also will not need to pass a separate placement exam.

Those placement exams are offered during the summer before students' first year in college, at a time when they have not been engaged in studying the subjects, meaning they may be more likely to be placed in remedial courses that they do not need.

The criteria colleges used for accepting students are not changing. Admitted students will still have the option to choose to take placement tests to qualify for credit bearing courses.

In 2012, more than half the Delaware public school graduates who enrolled in in-state colleges had to take remedial classes because they were determined to be not ready for college-level work, according to [Delaware's State Report: College Enrollment, Remediation, and Performance](#). National data shows that less than 50 percent of students who take remedial classes will complete the class hindering their ability to receive a college degree.

"Today's announcement marks another important step toward giving Delaware students the best chance to succeed in continuing their education beyond high school," Governor Markell said. "Delaware's colleges and universities are not only sending our high school juniors a clear signal that the Smarter Assessments are a valuable tool. They are also showing a commitment to preventing students from taking unnecessary remedial courses, which too often put students off track before they even start their college education.

Smarter Assessments emphasize the importance of a deep understanding of subject matter, critical-thinking, problem-solving, writing and reading more complex materials—all skills necessary for success in college. Those skills are stressed in the Common Core State Standards that Delaware teachers have used in their classrooms in recent years. The standards are not a curriculum but are a set of clear, consistent guidelines for what students should be able to do at each grade level in

math and ELA.

Secretary of Education Mark Murphy said the colleges' decisions "show that they believe the Common Core standards are rigorous and that the Smarter Assessments provide a good measure of college readiness."

Delaware State University Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Alton Thompson agreed. "Delaware State University supports the use of the Smarter Balanced Assessments for placement because we think it's a great idea to give students incentives to master the Common Core State Standards," he said. "If they master those standards, as measured by the assessments, we feel confident that they'll be able to handle college-level work. We have to demonstrate that our students are learning in order to be considered an effective institution and this will help us do that."

Dr. Mark Brainard, the president of Delaware Technical Community College, said, "Our focus at Delaware Tech has always been to provide access to higher education and we view the Smarter Balanced assessment as an additional means to demonstrate college readiness and facilitate students' transition to college. We will continue to collaborate with the Department of Education and the school districts on this and other initiatives to prepare students to be successful."

The Governor announced the agreements with the colleges at the University of Delaware.

"The K-12 school system is working hard to prepare students to enter college and the workforce and the Common Core State Standards help chart a path that students can follow to reach those goals," University of Delaware President Patrick T. Harker said. "By setting policies around the Smarter Balanced Assessments, we can be sure that students are ready for our entry-level courses. That's good for the school system. It's good for institutions like UD. And most of all, it's good for

students and their families, who will know—early and often—where they stand on the path toward college or work.”

Wilmington University also will use Smarter Balanced assessment scores in making placement decisions but is working out details of the new policy. Jim Wilson, Wilmington University’s Vice President of Academic Affairs, said accepting the scores “is in line with our mission of providing opportunities for higher education to students of varying ages.”

In addition, Wesley College is considering how it will treat students’ Smarter Balanced assessment scores. “Wesley College is enthusiastic about exploring options to help our Delaware students transition successfully to college,” Dr. Patricia M. Dwyer, Wesley’s provost and vice president for academic affairs, said.

Delaware is one of 19 states and territories that are members of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, which created the assessments. “This is a game changer,” said Tony Alpert, Smarter Balanced Executive Director. “In the past, most state tests had no linkage to higher ed. Smarter Balanced has worked with states and higher education to give meaning to high school exams.”

Alpert noted, “Reducing students’ need for remediation can go a long way toward meeting state and national goals for increased degree attainment, as research has consistently shown that students who enter college without need for remediation are far more likely to complete a degree.”

####